

Amendments to the Drawings:

The attached sheet of drawings includes changes to Fig.1. This sheet, which includes

Fig.1, replaces the original sheet including Fig.1.

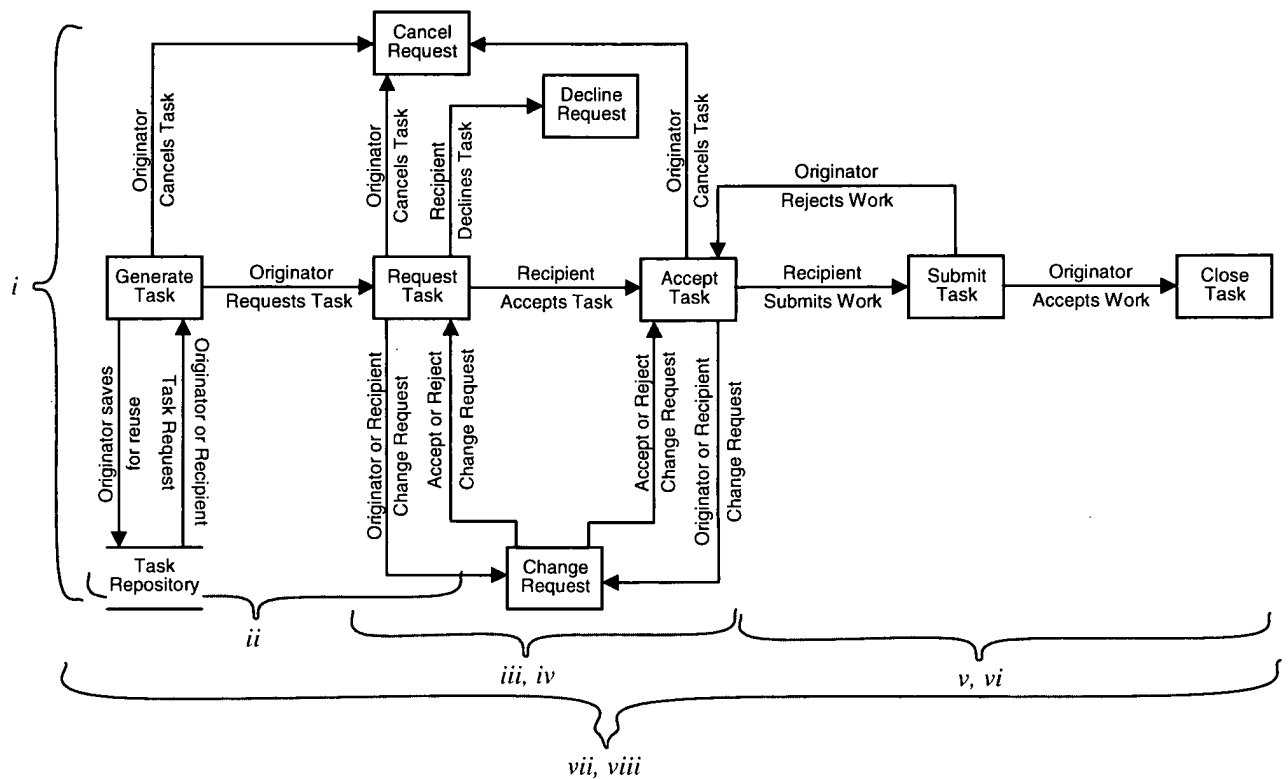
REMARKS

Claims 1-15 remain pending in the present application. Of these, claims 1-15 stand rejected. Claims 1, 3-10 and 15 have been amended. Claim 1 is the independent claim. The subject matter called for by the amended claims is clearly supported by the original specification; consequently, no new matter has been added. Reconsideration of the application in light of the amendments to the claims and the following remarks is respectfully requested.

The Examiner's consideration of the IDS submitted on June 23, 2004, is noted with appreciation.

Discussion of Present Application

Applicant's invention, as recited by independent claim 1, as amended, provides an enterprise wide task and commitment management system for monitoring and recording single tasks that form part of a project. These tasks can be performed by two employees, (a) one functions as a task Originator and (b) the other as a task Recipient, in a matrix based organization. The system includes a task state machine system software means for enforcing one or more rules of the task state machine, which incorporates the schema required by the task state machine diagram shown below:



The task state machine system software means also advantageously persists all the task state changes to a relational database.

The system also includes a task state machine graphic interface means that is associated with the system software. It provides for the ability to transact tasks, and for the visibility of task related details, to management, based on an organizational hierarchy.

The present invention, as defined by the above claims, addresses a strong need in the art for an organizationally interactive task management system in a matrix based organizational environment, wherein the recipient of a task is provided with an opportunity to accept, decline or modify the task, work on the task, submit the task. Advantageously all of these interactions are recorded by the system and are visible to inline managers responsible for employee performance evaluations based on organizational hierarchy.

Commitment management, as defined by the applicant in the present application, allows employees to solicit work from coworkers and perform work for coworkers both inside and outside of their direct reporting lines. It formalizes the task transaction by tracking all states of the transaction and making that work visible to inline managers for the purpose of recognition, reward and operational management. This effectively and advantageously corrects the motivational disconnect that currently exists in matrix activities, provides first hand content for the performance appraisal, creates a task transaction repository for business process managers to mine for new efficiencies, archives indisputable evidence for a fiscal compliance audit, and generates a real time view of a the execution of corporate objectives.

Execution of corporate strategy often requires task collaboration across departments. Since the manager-subordinate relationship is not often present across reporting structures, traditional task delegation and project management are not viable options hence management often executes strategy using email, meetings and phone calls; these transient communications lack task accountability, commitment and status. This invention enables cross department collaboration by enabling a task originator to negotiate a task with a task recipient within the bounds of a task state machine, regardless of the task participants' departmental membership. Further, the task transaction is automatically made visible to the upward, inline management of the task participants. By using negotiation instead of delegation, collaboration can occur horizontally across departments; additionally, the automatic visibility of the task transaction to management provides task commitment, accountability and status. Together, task negotiation and

management visibility enable collaboration at an executive or organic level, within or across reporting structures.

The presently claimed system, uses a software program that embodies every detail of the task state machine (depicted in Figure 1), which defines the possible interaction between an Originator and a Recipient of a task that represents a portion or subset of tasks in a project. It is an advantageous, salient feature of the present invention, that the Originator defines the task that includes details and time frame of the task, and sends it to a Recipient, advantageously starting a task negotiation process. The Recipient, upon receipt of the request, examines the task and may decide to accept it, decline it or change the details or time frame of the task; and the Recipient's subsequent action is received by the Originator. This negotiation process commits the Recipient of the task and is advantageously recorded by the system, including the negotiation process, which provides a commitment management function as defined by the present application.

The Organizationally Interactive Task Management and Commitment Management System of the present invention incorporates several primary features, which are highly advantageous. (i) A complex project is broken into a set of tasks, each negotiated between the Originator and the Recipient. (ii) A selective interaction between the Originator of a task and the Recipient of a task, wherein the Originator defines a task to be executed by the Recipient. (iii) An opportunity for the Recipient to accept, decline or modify the task requested of him. (iv) An opportunity for the Originator to (a) accept the modification or (b) reject it, or (c) cancel the task. (v) An opportunity for the Recipient to complete the work and submit it to the Originator or partition the work into one or more subtasks. (vi) An opportunity for the Originator to accept the work and close

the task or send it back for rework from the Recipient. (vii) The entire interaction between the Originator and the Recipient is completely visible to everyone within the upward, inline management hence management is able to advantageously and seamlessly monitor the progress of a single step of a complex project, which has a task interaction between an Originator and a Recipient. (viii) This visibility advantageously allows managers to easily assess performance and reward employees regardless of reporting structure and improve performance by contributing advisory comments to the task status log or in more severe cases, intervene by reassigning a task. (Note: The numerals *i-viii* correspond to the numerals shown in the task state machine diagram presented earlier in this discussion.)

By accepting a task request through this task management system, as opposed to an undocumented verbal conversation or a static e-mail, the employee has made an explicit commitment to their coworker and an implicit commitment to the organization due to the default task visibility rights given to the management hierarchy of the task originator and task recipient. As such, work is shifted from a relationship dependent, inter-employee plea, to a managerially visible corporate commitment; thus, the apt name commitment management. This provides another advantageous salient feature of the present invention.

Discussion of Amendments

Applicant has amended the specification by submitting a replacement Abstract. Applicant has amended claim 1 to include the task state machine diagram that was referred to in that claim as originally filed. Claims 3 and 15 have been amended to

clarify what applicant regards as the present invention. Applicant has also amended the claims 1, 3-10 and 15 to address minor issues with regard to antecedent basis. A replacement Figure 1 that is more legible than the one submitted when the application was filed, has also been submitted.

Objection to the Specification

The abstract of the discloser has been objected to because it exceeds the maximum allowable length. In response, a substitute abstract has been included herewith. With this amendment, it is submitted that the objection the specification has been obviated.

Accordingly, reconsideration of the objection to the specification, as amended, is respectfully requested.

Claim Rejections under 35 U.S.C § 102

Claims 1-2 stand rejected under 35 U.S.C § 102(b) as being anticipated by Fredell et al. (US Patent Publication 2001/0028364).

The Fredell Reference

Fredell discloses a method and system for distributing electronic documents, generally including sensitive information to selected users, and for communicating to such users, tasks that need to be executed in connection with a project. Fredell also allows for the tracking and the managing execution of such tasks. Fredell provides for a method and system for securely communicating and managing project information

among multiple project participants. In particular, it includes a database located at a secure data storage facility and a computer program operable at such a facility for enabling reception, storage and transmission of securely encrypted documents. Access to these documents is enabled through a global computer network, using conventional network browser software with encryption capability. Any project participant can download a document to which he/she has access, make modifications as desired using conventional word processors and upload modified documents with comments to the storage facility. However, original documents at the facility may only be modified by selected persons having authorization to edit such originals. The invention may also provide read-only capability to selected project participants and preclude upload capability by other selected users. If desired, active notification to intended document reviewers of the presence of a document at the secure storage facility for review can be provided. (See, discussion at pg. 1, para. 2 and 9 of Fredell)

Fredell essentially discloses a traditional task delegation method with the implicit assumption that a project manager has the authority to assign a task to a project participant; in fact the discussion at pg. 9, para. 113, of Fredell states that one of its purposes is to, “[p]rovide the ability for a project manager to create, assign, and reassign tasks to project participants”. Conversely, the applicant discloses a managerially visible task negotiation procedure to establish task commitment in a matrix organization where a project manager or task originator may not have the authority to assign work to recipients that reside across different reporting lines.

Applicant has amended independent claim 1 to include the task state machine diagram that is implemented by the presently claimed invention. As discussed above, the

task state machine diagram clarifies the requirement that the Originator and Recipient of a task be allowed to negotiate the terms of the task, with each participant having the ability to cancel/decline the request.

Applicant respectfully submits that Fredell discloses methods and systems that control which participants have access to which files and for communicating to users, tasks that need to be executed in connection with a project. As such, Fredell fails to disclose, teach, or suggest a negotiation procedure between a task Originator and Recipient as required by amended independent claim 1.

Accordingly, applicant respectfully submits that amended claim 1 is not anticipated by Fredell, as Fredell fails to disclose, teach, or suggest each and every element recited by amended claim 1. Claims 2 and 3 depend directly from claim 1, necessarily including the elements and limitations thereof. These dependant claims recite additional features which are neither disclosed, nor fairly suggested by the applied reference. For example, the applied reference does not disclose or suggest an enterprise wide task and commitment management system wherein the system software means is resident on a single server computer, as recited by claim 2. Thus, it is respectfully submitted that dependent claims 2 and 3 are not anticipated by the Fredell teaching.

Accordingly, reconsideration of the rejection of claims 1-3 under 35 USC § 102(b) as being anticipated by Fredell et al. (US Patent Publication 2001/0028364), is respectfully requested.

Claim Rejections under 35 U.S.C § 103

Claims 4-15 stand rejected under 35 U.S.C § 103(a) as being obvious over Fredell in view of Corral (US Patent 7,337,124).

The Corral Reference

Corral is directed to a quality software management method and system. Corral discloses that its objects are achieved by a quality management framework system including a plurality of computer implemented tools accessible by the users for operating a plurality of quality processes. Data relative to the quality processes is collected and aggregated to generate a plurality of respective quality reports. Process defects are detected through a defect prevention tool, and quality actions are initiated in a feedback quality management action tracking process. Fig. 2 discloses a document review and acceptance process that are further depicted in Figs 6-a and 6-b. Figs. 6-a and 6-b disclose a document review and acceptance process, which starts with storing a first draft 602 and ends with storing an accepted vendor document in step 6012. (See, the discussion at col. 1, lines 5-8; col. 2, lines 20-27, col. 17, lines 19-23; col. 19, line 10 through col. 21, line 40; Tables 21-27; and Figs. 2, 6-a and 6-b of Corral)

Applicant respectfully submits that claims 4-15 depend directly or indirectly from amended independent claim 1 and necessarily include the limitations of that claim. Thus, the rejections against claims 4-15 also necessarily depend on Fredell disclosing each and every limitation of claim 1.

As discussed above Fredell is deficient in disclosing, teaching, or suggesting each and every limitation of amended independent claim 1. Though Corral shows a back and

forth process, where a deliverable document is reviewed and modified, based on a set of preapproved parameters, it fails to disclose, teach, or suggest a negotiation procedure between a task Originator and Recipient that negotiates the terms of the project (in this case the deliverable document) before the beginning of the project, as clarified by the amendment made to independent claim 1.

It is respectfully submitted that Corral also discloses a traditional task delegation method with the implicit assumption that a project manager has the authority to assign a task to a project participant; In fact the discussion, at col. 7, lines 40-43, of Corral, states that , “To Analyze an Issue/Risk/Change. After opening it in the database, it is assigned an Action Manager, an Actioner or a Responsible (for issue, risk and change), a Priority, and a Target Date.” Conversely, the applicant discloses a managerially visible task negotiation procedure to establish task commitment in a matrix organization where a project manager or task originator may not have the authority to assign work to recipients that reside across different reporting lines.

As such, Corral fails to remedy the deficiencies of Fredell and the combination of Fredell and Corral fails to disclose, teach, or suggest each and every element of amended independent claim 1. Moreover, since claims 4-15 depend directly or indirectly from amended independent claim 1, necessarily including the elements and limitations thereof, it is respectfully submitted that those claims also define patentably over the applied art, for at least the reasons discussed with regard to independent claim 1.

Accordingly, reconsideration of the rejection of claims 4-15 under 35 USC § 103(a) as being obvious over Fredell in view of Corral (US Patent 7,337,124) is respectfully requested.

CONCLUSION

In view of the amendments to the claims and the remarks set forth above, it is respectfully submitted that the present application is in allowable condition. Allowance of the application is, therefore, earnestly solicited.

Respectfully submitted,
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